

# Officials grapple with downed trees

BY TOM ROBERTSON

MPR News 91.3 FM

**CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST** – In the once-pristine campground of Norway Beach, the south shore of Cass Lake is unrecognizable.

Giant, old-growth red pines, many between 100 and 200 years old, are strewn across the landscape. Some are uprooted, others snapped in half. Piled upon each other like toothpicks, they cover trails and campsites.

The beach was hit hard in early July, when straight-line winds in excess of 80 mph knocked down hundreds of thousands of trees in a wide swath stretching from Bemidji to Grand Rapids.

Clean-up efforts continue from the storms that ripped across northern Minnesota, with state, federal and county forest managers trying to determine how best to clean up the trees scattered across miles and miles of public lands.

At Norway Beach, about half of the 170 campsites were occupied when the winds whipped through, Forest Supervisor Darla Lenz said.

"There was no one injured and there was no one killed, and I consider it a miracle," Lenz said.

But the land was heavily scarred. Within the Chippewa National Forest alone, the storm affected an area 10 miles wide and 40 miles long. About 17,000 acres of forest sustained moderate to severe damage.

Norway Beach probably won't reopen this summer. Several other recreation areas are closed indefinitely, along with more than 100 miles of bike and hiking trails.

Forest managers want to bring commercial logging crews in as soon as possible to salvage the trees for saw timber. Downed pine trees that sit for more than about six weeks are prone to bark beetle infestation and a fungus called blue stain, which damages the quality of the wood.

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However, Lenz said she doesn't have enough staff to ensure the timber is appraised and on the market that quickly.

"Because of the magnitude of the blowdown, it's unlikely we'd be able to recover all of it for saw timber," she said. "We believe we'll have some areas that have higher fuel levels now, may be more prone to wildfires in the future, so we need to plan on treating those areas, and we won't be able to accomplish all of that work in one year."

Forest workers with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources are under the same pressure. The July 2 storm whipped through Itasca State Park and up the Mississippi River corridor, damaging about 40,000 acres of public and private lands.

DNR regional forest manager Dave Thomas said storms heavily damaged about 4,000 acres of state forest lands stretching from Bemidji to Deer River.

Forest officials hope to salvage as much pine as possible.

Aspen and other hardwoods may have to wait until next year. The long-term plan is to replant the damaged forests.

"When we've got this valuable of a resource lying on the ground, we want to get that back into production," Thomas said. "It's a very important part of our local economy up here."

Restoring the forests into production will cost millions. But some say the DNR's budget is already stretched. Sen. John Carlson, R-Bemidji, has asked that recovery money for the agency be included in a late-August special legislative session to deal with flood damage in the northeast.

Carlson hopes the Legislature will provide sufficient funding to help the DNR pay for cleanup and replanting.

"We need to get this cleaned up... and it's going to take an extraordinary measure to go out and to set up land sales where they

weren't anticipating land sales because it wasn't ready," Carlson said. "It just puts an extra burden on the agency."

At the Chippewa National Forest, ranger Carolyn Upton said the blowdown recovery will take years. She said people have been coming to the forest for generations, and it may take awhile for them to get used to the altered landscape.

"To a certain extent there's going to be a period of mourning from what was lost here, just because it's a very unique area and the characteristics of some spots around here, with the giant, old, red pines," Upton said. "It's gone, and it will take another generation for that to come back."

If anything good has come from the blowdown, it may be some jobs. Forest managers say the cleanup will put logging crews to work that have otherwise been idle because of the slow economy.